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ABSTRACT

An informal survey examined education students' recollections about learning to read to gain insights about their reading attitudes. It was anticipated that, as a result of the study, subsequent courses education majors would take in reading instruction and/or in their field experiences might need to be modified. The survey was conducted over a three-semester period with students who had attended a seminar on reading instruction during which they responded in writing to the question, "What do you recall about learning to read?" Responses were analyzed for attitudes toward reading and were assigned to one of three attitudinal categories: positive, negative, or neutral recollections about reading. Neutral recollections formed the largest category in the survey; positive and negative attitudes were almost evenly divided. Most of the positive recollections dealt with personal enjoyment of reading, while there were several negative recollections about oral reading in school. Study results suggest that, without course work which would stress the positive, appropriate, and practical use of oral reading in the classroom, prospective teachers may shy away from having students read orally. Responses also indicate that the pleasure that reading can offer ought to be reinforced along with methods and skills in all courses in reading instruction. (JD)

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READING ATTITUDES OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS

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READING ATTITUDES OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS

Our personal successes and failures with learning as well as observations of our own teachers have likely contributed to the attitudes we hold about the teaching and learning processes. Surely, prospective teachers enter their college preparatory programs with a set of such attitudes as well. There is considerable evidence to indicate that student teachers' perceptions and ideas, which have emerged from their past experiences, are often modified as a result of the field experiences they have while in college (Schofield and Start 1977; Cohen 1976; Wolfe and Halperin 1977; Harty 1976).

Educational researchers have been urged to look carefully into the ". . .emotional, personality and attitudinal variables in teaching. . ." in order to help teacher educators structure or modify their courses and field requirements to promote the most desirable attitudes feasible (Cyphert and Openshaw 1964). In order for teacher educators to make optimum use of information about students' attitudes, it would need to be elicited early in the preparatory program so that subsequent courses and field experiences might be tailored to build upon positive feelings, to help modify negative attitudes and to correct erroneous perceptions detected.

If education majors may have been influenced by

their personal encounters in learning to read, it becomes particularly important to know what students personally remember of that process because attitudes are likely to be revealed that will influence the future teachers' work with children in this critical area.

The purpose of the informal survey to be reported here was to examine recollections of a group of education students about learning to read in order to gain insights about their reading attitudes. It was anticipated that, as a result, subsequent courses the students would take in the teaching of reading and/or their field experiences might need to be modified.

Related Research

Several researchers have looked at pre-service teachers' recollections and attitudes about learning to read. Warner (1970) reported a study of 200 elementary education majors in their final phase of pre-service preparation at the University of California at Los Angeles. The research was designed to detect the influence of students' early instruction in reading and their personal attitudes about reading on their methods preferences in teaching reading. Comparisons of the ways students had been introduced to reading with their methodology preferences in teaching had led Warner to conclude that teaching preferences had been influenced,

significantly, by the ways the students had, themselves, been taught to read.

Artley (1975) asked 100 education majors to recall all they could from their personal experiences in reading which might indicate either effective or ineffective teaching practices. Many students remembered little about their teachers. Some, however, recalled being motivated by teachers who had read to them, by those who had provided free time for reading in the classroom and by those who had given them awards. Other students felt that ineffective teachers had failed to provide encouragement, had required excessive drill on skills, had made them feel that reading was a chore or purposeless exercise or had required too many written reports of their readings. Oral reading, grouping, prescribed reading lists and teachers' threats were also listed as negative recollections. Apart from teachers, Artley found that positive influences had often come from parents or other family members.

Bruckerhoff (1977) used Artley's procedures with 191 high school students in Wisconsin to discover what those students remembered about ". . .both good and bad. . ." experiences with reading which might be of practical help to teachers in the schools. One hundred seventy eight of the responses were used. Positive reactions were reported about a wide variety of

instructional practices and techniques that had personally influenced individual students. Positive contributions were attributed to libraries and good books. Similar to Artley, Bruckerhoff found many students (42 percent) remembered that family members, particularly parents, grandparents and siblings, had contributed positively to their reading attitudes. Twenty one percent of the students cited negative recollections about book reports while 11 percent felt that being made to read orally in front of others had been deleterious. Grouping and several other practices were also mentioned negatively.

The Old Westbury Survey

The present survey was conducted over a three semester period (Fall 1977, Spring 1978 and Fall 1978) with students enrolled in an introductory course in the Education Program at the State University of New York, College at Old Westbury. It is important to note that students at Old Westbury represent a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The college's mission provides an opportunity for students who have been bypassed, traditionally (i.e., ethnic and racial minorities, bilingual students, older students and women), to work toward a college education. Although some students enter the college directly after high school, many others attend later in life, producing an average

age in the upper twenties each semester, somewhat older than is usual at most undergraduate colleges. The sample of students in this survey is representative of this population.

The introductory course in which the students participated is one that is usually taken in the first semester of the sophomore year and is one required of students who anticipate majoring in elementary and early childhcod education. It is designed to assist prospective majors in making a decision about pursuing teaching as a career. Each week of the semester, students are required to participate for a half day in a nearby preschool or elementary classroom and attend a seminar at the college. Reading instruction is one of several curricular topics and issues explored at the seminars.

In the three semesters, 45 students had attended the specific seminar on reading instruction during which they had been asked to respond in writing to the question, "What do you recall about learning to read?" The students were instructed to write any and all thoughts which came to mind and were told they did not need to sign their papers. All written responses were collected from the students and analyzed for attitudes which might suggest needs to be met in reading methods courses and/or field experiences the students would take subsequently.

Each individual response was next assigned to

one of three attitudinal categories: positive, neutral and negative recollections about reading. Recollections assigned to the positive category included both direct and implied remarks or words indicating that the student had a positive remembrance. "I enjoyed reading all of the time," and "Good stories always ended too fast for me," are examples. Neutral recollections were those having no definite or implied attitudes. They included simple recollections such as, "I remember memorizing some words" or "I recall learning the alphabet." Statements which expressed negative attitudes such as, "It was extremely frustrating" and "I had to learn to spell a lot of words that didn't mean a thing to me," were placed in the negative category. Results are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of Attitudes

About Learning to Read

Attitudinal Response Category	Number of Recollections	Percent of Total Recollections
Neutral	109	69
Negative	25	16
Positive	23	15

Assignment reliability was checked by an associate

who independently categorized the recollections. Any differences in the assignments were discussed and finally assigned only after agreement was reached.

Discussion

A total of 157 individual recollections, a mean of 3.5 per student, was found in the 45 student response papers. Neutral recollections formed the largest category in this survey. Of the 109 responses classified as neutral, 36 were personal in nature. To illustrate such personal recollections, individuals mentioned that they had:

--learned to read in English only after reading in another language.
--tried to remember words.
--gone to the library or a reading center.
--joined a book club.
--remembered the first words they had learned to read.
--remembered that it had been quiet during reading instruction in school.
--recalled the name of a particular teacher who had taught them.
--remembered titles of specific books.
--recalled the time when they had learned to read.

Twenty-two neutral remarks were made about specific characters, books, workbooks or various other reading materials. The most frequently mentioned characters were Dick, Spot, Tip and Mitten. Phonics or sounding-out words was cited by 17 students and six remembered that they had been required to memorize whole words while learning to read. Four students listed family members who had taught them while others mentioned reading groups and an assortment of teaching practices.

Similar to Bruckerhoff (1977), this investigator found a number of negative recollections about oral reading in school. Some students remembered that learning to read had generally been frustrating for them. Others noted specific materials they had disliked or punishments connected with trying to learn to read; only one student was found to express negative feelings about a specific teacher.

Most of the positive recollections dealt with personal enjoyment of reading itself as an independent activity. Some students mentioned specific books or characters they had remembered fondly and a few cited techniques teachers had used which had been particularly helpful to them.

An examination of the results revealed that there were comparatively few highly negative or

exceptionally positive remembrances about learning to read. It was noted that, as might have been expected, much of the information gleaned was personal in nature and quite individual. However, two items appeared of sufficient import and were mentioned frequently enough to merit consideration in the students' subsequent reading courses.

First, it seemed quite likely that negative experiences with oral reading could influence some of the students in their use of it in teaching. It is possible that, without course work which would stress the positive, appropriate and practical uses of oral reading in the classroom, those prospective teachers might tend to shy away from having children read orally. However, with information and guidance, the students might be led to note the potential values of oral reading for rightful purposes and in situations that would not be frustrating to the children they teach.

The second, and perhaps most important informational item gleaned from this survey, was that enjoyment of reading itself was often recalled by the students. Surely, the pleasure that reading can offer is a message that ought to be reinforced along with methods and skills in all courses in the teaching of reading. It is likely that students who enjoy reading themselves will easily identify with the need to

provide the children they teach with ample time to enjoy independent reading activities at school. In the past, many opportunities to share the pleasurable aspects of reading may have been ignored or overlooked by teachers who become, as a result of the many pressures upon them, more concerned with skills than with fostering enjoyment. In general, the results of this survey suggest that the pleasures of reading are especially memorable. Perhaps, then, teacher educators need to emphasize the importance of providing children with time in school to read for their own enjoyment.

To conclude, the obvious limitations of this small survey preclude any further recommendations for teacher educators in general or drawing any conclusions regarding the usefulness of such surveys as devices for improving undergraduate reading methods courses and field experiences. Perhaps, in the future, more comprehensive surveys will be designed to sample the recollections of larger and more diverse groups of student teachers for those purposes.

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